

# Our Bumper Crop of Wild Birds

By DONALD A. CRAIG.

**M**IGRATORY game birds are appearing in larger numbers this autumn over the United States than at any time for the last twenty years. Wild ducks of many species, wild geese, curlew, willet, black bellied plover, golden plover, yellowlegs, whistling swans and rails are flying southward and dropping into the rivers, lakes, bays, marshes and swamps in such numbers as to delight the hearts of sportsmen and bird lovers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Even the shy woodcock is a little more than holding its own.

This cheerful news comes only a few short years after the alarm that was sounded throughout the nation that our splendid heritage of wild fowl was being rapidly wiped out of existence. It is no longer guesswork—this story of the increase in our wild fowl—nor is it based upon haphazard reports from irresponsible and untrained observers. The fact of the big increase this year is substantiated by the migratory bird division of the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, which is charged with the enforcement of the Federal game regulations, under the migratory bird treaty with Canada and the law enacted by Congress to carry out the treaty.

In the office of the chief United States game warden is kept a card file of reports from Federal wardens and deputy wardens in every State, and from observers upon whom the Department of Agriculture is able to rely for accurate information. I have selected the following samples from New York State as typical of those from every section of the country.

"Best shooting in fourteen years. I have shot shore birds in Lawrence. Mr. Newbold Herrick's records for twenty-seven years show the same."—From H. F. Stone, The Moorings, Lawrence, L. I.

"I am reliably informed that wild fowl flight is greater than any season in past twenty years and that there was a noticeable increase in the amount of woodcock."—From E. E. Chapman, Hamburg, N. Y.

"Canadian geese more plentiful than ever before in this section. Woodcock seem to be plentiful. Largest flight of yellowlegs ever seen near here: 10,000 in one hour."—From P. S. Farnum, Owego, N. Y.

Black duck is undoubtedly leader in numbers in this locality. Great blue heron also increased probably 25 per cent."—From Edward C. Dunning, White Plains.

Already the ducks and geese are beginning to appear in large flocks south of Washington, on the Potomac and Patuxent rivers and all over Chesapeake Bay, that paradise for wild fowl. Albert Poe, whose knowledge of wild life on the lower Potomac is scarcely equaled among the local river men, says he has never seen them in such numbers, and the writer, to whom Mr. Poe made this statement, can corroborate the assertion after witnessing the flight one afternoon and evening this month. Bill Watson, over on the Patuxent, has sent word to his friends in Washington to be ready for the biggest season for black ducks and mallards in fifty years. William E. Curley, at Calvert Bay, on the lower Potomac, sends the same word regarding the "open water" ducks that prevail in those waters.

The reports concerning the increases in the various sorts of migratory game birds received by the Biological Survey may be summarized as follows:

**Ducks and geese:** Increasing to a remarkable extent in every part of the country; breeding where they have not bred within the memory of persons now living. Breeding of black duck this year was especially noticeable in New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.

**Shore birds:** Undoubtedly on the increase. Willet and curlew, two of our largest and most important shore birds, which were near extinction a few years ago, now coming back in great numbers. There is at present no open season on them. The three kinds of plover, for which there is an open season, are also increasing rapidly, although not so fast as the ducks, chiefly due to the fact that they lay only from two to four eggs, while wild ducks lay a clutch of twelve to eighteen eggs, or as many as they can cover.

**Whistling swan:** No open season; increasing to such an extent that they have become almost a nuisance in some localities. Some gunners think they are de-

New York Herald correspondent that such a measure is necessary to complete and make permanent the splendid work that has already been done.

"According to the terms of this bill," said Secretary Wallace, "it proposes to accomplish two main objects:

"1. The purchase or rental and maintenance of marsh and water areas especially suitable for migratory wild fowl, which shall be used as free public shooting grounds in the open hunting season and safeguarded as breeding and resting places for these birds in the closed season.

"2. The administration of the migratory bird treaty act in order to more adequately maintain and increase the supply of migratory birds, including not only ducks, geese and others classed as game, but the great host of smaller species which are so vitally essential to the agricultural interests of the country through their unceasing war on injurious insects.

"Reports received by the department

fur bearers as the muskrats, skunks and raccoons frequenting them.

3. The production in certain areas of grasses valuable for forage and for the manufacture of grass rugs, which has become a profitable industry; also, in some places, the production of willow suitable for basketry and other purposes.

4. A natural ice supply.

5. Definite help in maintaining the underground water level which is frequently essential for the production of forest growth and other vegetation.

6. An invaluable help in holding back the runoff of flood waters, assisting in preventing excessive erosion and flood damage. There is little doubt that if shallow lakes and swamp areas along drainage ways are systematically drained the danger of terrific floods and the enormous destruction of lives and property will be seriously increased, Mr. Wallace believes. This effect of extensive drainage work deserves, in his opinion, careful attention in view of its

definite relation to the public welfare.

7. Many of the more attractive of such water areas lend themselves admirably for educational uses and to assist in interesting people in outdoor recreation and in the natural resources of plant and animal life which are so important in supplying useful commodities.

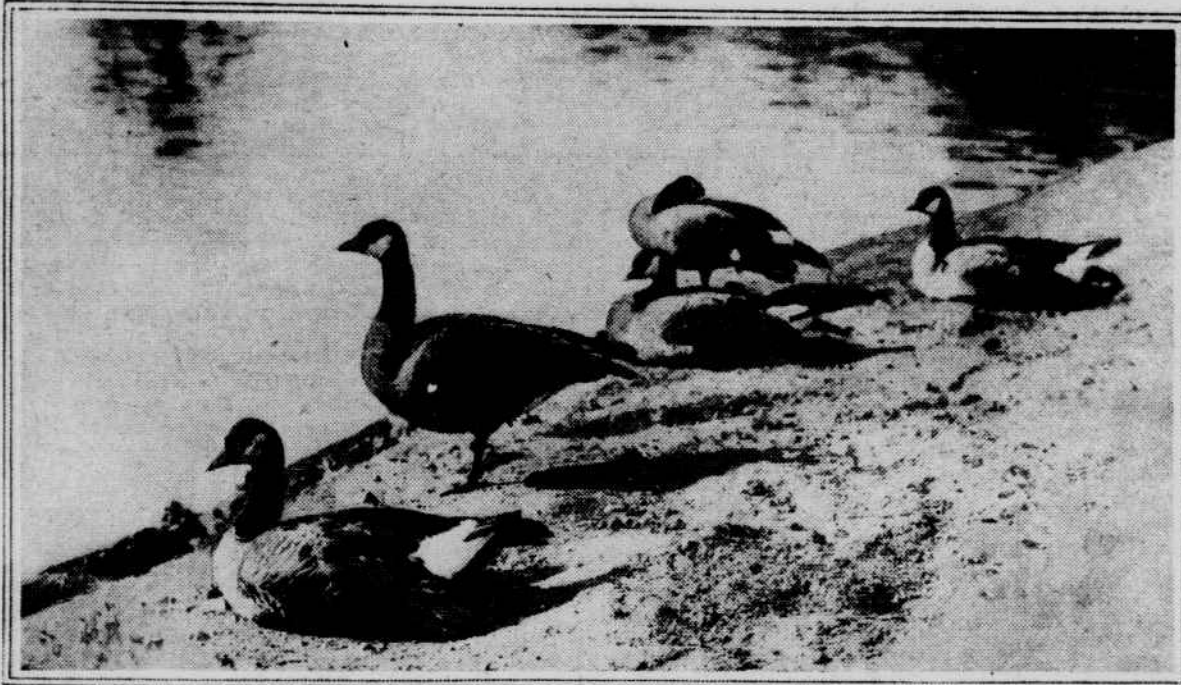
"There is little question," Mr. Wallace added, "that the greatest benefit of all from the establishment of public hunting grounds through the enactment of the present bill would be its contribution to the public welfare.

"At the present time it is estimated that more than 6,000,000 people in the United States engage in hunting of one kind or another each year. The rapidly increasing

drainage of marsh areas threatens the continuance of one of the most popular kinds of hunting. With the growing congestion of population and the unrest which such massing produces the maintenance and development of opportunities for outdoor recreation such as is here contemplated places this bill in the front rank among legislative measures bearing upon the public welfare. Throughout the United States a very large proportion of the men who spend a certain period each year in hunting are undoubtedly among our most desirable citizens. Through their outdoor recreations they develop their resourcefulness and maintain a physical and mental health which is of the utmost value in relation to their civic usefulness."

Many of the most favorable marsh areas for wild fowl shooting have been purchased and are being held by wealthy sportsmen as hunting clubs, thus curtailing opportunities for wild fowl hunting by the general public. The growing absorption of such areas by hunting clubs has created bitter criticism on the part of those who, through lack of means, are unable to enjoy such privileges. Secretary Wallace says the enactment of the present bill will give the public equally good shooting grounds and privileges with those of the wealthiest clubs, but without individual additional cost. It should completely destroy the cause for the antagonistic feeling on the part of the public in many sections toward such clubs.

"The maintenance of public shooting grounds," concluded Secretary Wallace, "would provide for the benefit of residents in both country and town large opportunities for continued wild fowl shooting that will be impossible in any other way. It might, in fact, be stated that the bill will provide Federal shooting clubs for the benefit of the general public at the nominal cost of a Federal hunting license of \$1 a year."



Wild geese in Louisiana.

stroying food necessary to keep the ducks from starving. Especially noticeable in Back Bay, Va., and Currituck Sound, N. C.

**Woodcock:** Holding their own everywhere, and slightly increasing in some localities.

The enforcement of the Federal game laws and regulations, under the terms of the treaty with Canada signed in 1916, together with the State laws, is altogether responsible for this remarkable change in the condition and future of our wild fowl, in the opinion of the experts of the Department of Agriculture. The prohibition of spring shooting is the chief factor, all agree, although the limited open seasons on all migratory game birds, the bag limits and the total prohibition of shooting of some species are also highly important factors.

But now our wild fowl are threatened with a new danger, according to the Government game experts. The drainage of marsh and swamp areas throughout the country, by which the birds are being deprived of their breeding, feeding and resting places when in the United States, is to a large extent offsetting the good that has been done by the Federal and State game laws.

This new danger is to be met. There is now pending in Congress a bill which has the backing of the Department of Agriculture and the American Game Protective Association of New York to create Government bird refuges and free public hunting grounds, to be paid for by a system of Federal licensing. It is proposed that every person who shoots migratory game birds shall take out a \$1 a year license from the nearest postmaster. This, it is believed, will bring in close to \$1,500,000 a year, which will be employed to buy shallow lakes, marshes and swamps, and to administer the Federal game laws.

Secretary of Agriculture Wallace, who is a hearty advocate of the bill, told THE

from all parts of the country agree that the alarming decrease of migratory wild fowl which preceded the negotiation of the migratory bird treaty with Canada and the passage of the act by Congress for the protection of migratory birds has changed to a marked increase.

"These reports show a cumulative increase not only in such migratory wild fowl as ducks, geese and other game birds, but also in many insect eating birds. Good evidence of the increase of migratory wild fowl under the migratory bird treaty act is contained in the report of the State Game Warden of Minnesota that during the hunting season of 1920 about 1,500,000 wild ducks were killed in that State. The meat value of these and other migratory game birds killed in that State in 1920 undoubtedly exceeded \$2,000,000. This indicates the economic advantage to the country at large to be derived in food value alone from the enactment of this bill.

"It is evident that the carrying out of the proposed conservation program under the Federal hunting license law would increase the total value of migratory wild fowl taken by hunters each year in the United States by millions of dollars in addition to insuring the perpetuation of this valuable natural resource.

"Another step of almost equally vital importance, if we are to hold what we have gained, remains to be taken. This is provided in the present bill, and consists of the conservation and perpetuation of a sufficient number of small inland lakes, as well as coastal swamp and marsh areas, to provide our migratory wild fowl necessary feeding, resting and breeding places within the United States."

Secretary Wallace said that in addition to the returns of water areas in wild fowl they may also yield the following products:

1. A valuable supply of food and game fish.
2. An annual return of furs from such